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The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Room 3E880
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This letter provides you with observations and recommendations from my recent fact finding visit to Iraq. I am optimistic about the future of Iraq, even though press reports detail daily carnage in some regions.

The main purpose of our visit was to continue oversight of efforts to develop a democratic regime, stabilize the security environment and reconstruct the country. People ask why, as Members of Congress, we go to Iraq. As elected Representatives of the American people it is our responsibility to get information first hand and not rely solely on the press or the Administration for reports on progress.

We met with United States and Iraqi government officials and members of the opposition including:

Chargé, Ambassador James Jeffrey,
Commanding General, Multi-National Forces—Iraq, General George Casey,
Commanding General, Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq, General David Petreaus,
Prime Minister Ibrahim Al-Ja'afari,
Minister of Defense Saadoun Al-Duleimi,
Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Chalabi, and
Delegation members from the Sunni Council of National Dialogue, Dr. Saleh Mutlak, Sheikh Khalaf Olian, Abdul Nasir al-Janabi, and Dr. Mohmood al-Mishadany.

Over the course of eight visits to Iraq during the past 25 months, my staff and I have noted setbacks, but also progress. Numerous Iraqi officials have told us of mistakes made by the United States—flawed planning for post-conflict Iraq by the Department of Defense; allowing Iraqis to loot the city immediately after Coalition forces took control; the indiscriminate de-Baathification of government employees; the dissolution of Iraqi security forces; the shock to the economic system of changing from a state run to a market economy; and the most egregious mistake, allowing Americans to be the face of Iraq for over a year rather than having Iraqis face the press and public to explain what was happening inside Iraq. However, even with all of these mistakes, we have made significant progress.

While some of the world argues over the rightness of the war, Iraq has been moving forward. We now have an Iraqi government elected by the majority of Iraqis. A constitution is being drafted by most representatives of Iraqi society. There will be another election in December 2006 to select a permanent Parliament. There are over 165,000 Iraqi security forces, some fully capable of accomplishing their mission and some currently being trained and equipped, and more are on their way.

There is also progress being made, although incremental, in the reconstruction of the infrastructure and economy. Electrical power availability is increasing, and is now above pre-war levels. The Trade Bank of Iraq issued Iraq's first credit/debit cards, and the Iraq Stock Exchange traded nearly 14 billion shares within its first seven months and has tripled trading volume in less than one year.

We believe Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Chalabi accurately described to us the four challenges currently facing the Iraqi people in their pursuit of a stable, democratic nation—security, sovereignty, essential services and public corruption.

Observations and Recommendations on SECURITY

There appears to be an unholy supply of insurgents, both foreign terrorist and former regime elements attempting to destroy the vision of Iraqi democracy. However, more Iraqis every day take up the sacred cause of making that vision a reality.

General Petreaus and his team have taken on the enormous task of building an Iraqi security force. There is a viable transition plan in place to replace Coalition forces with Iraqi security forces, and metrics have been established to evaluate those replacements. With over 165,000 personnel, they are well on their way to developing a credible force and some of those are beginning to secure restive areas.

As that new Iraqi security force is recruited, we should press the Iraqi government to insure they represent all factions of Iraqi society. A security force predominantly comprised of only Shia and Kurd could eventually lead to sectarian violence and exacerbate tensions in an already volatile situation. Additionally, the Minister of Defense told us he was going to disband all militias and integrate them into the new Iraqi security force.

We should keep in mind the difficulty of keeping terrorists geographically constrained. Iraq needs assistance from its neighbors to eliminate safe havens for the insurgents. We should expose, at every opportunity, the help border states are providing to foreign insurgents fighting in Iraq, whether this support is sanctioned by the bordering government or not. We should also consider former Prime Minister Allawi's recommendation to place United Nation troops along the Syrian border to better control entry and access points into and out of Iraq.

A final note on security relates to the terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. During the period April through December 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority raised expectations by predicting violence in Iraq would subside after the capture of Saddam Hussein. Hussein was captured. The violence continued, and violence will continue even after Zarqawi is captured. We should restrain ourselves from raising expectation of diminished violence when Zarqawi is taken.

Observations and Recommendations on SOVEREIGNTY

The Iraqi government has made enormous strides in the past 25 months from a tyrannical regime to an elected government. The leaders of the elected Iraq government are in place, and the bureaucracy is being re-formed. We believe the new leaders are committed to an inclusive, pluralistic and secular government which will not stress societal divisions, but rather focus on Iraq as an integrated nation.

The United States should not be running Iraq. We now have advisors in every aspect of their government, in all the ministries, in their military and police units, and in their economy. Under Saddam Hussein and the Coalition Provisional Authority, the Iraqis had their decisions made for them. Now is the time for Iraqis to make their own decisions. We should step back and let them run their country.

As with the security forces, all factions within Iraq should be represented in the new government. Because many of the Sunnis refused to participate in the elections, they are under represented. We should continue to impress upon the new Iraqi leaders the need to be as inclusive as possible and draw in as many Sunnis, in both the bureaucracy and into the commission that is drafting the Iraqi constitution. We should also look ahead to the Iraqi elections in December and recommend innovative ways to bring more Sunnis into the election process.

The representatives of the Sunni Council of National Dialogue complained they were under represented on the committee drafting the constitution. The Prime Minister informed us he is broadening the number of people on the constitutional drafting committee and will include a greater number of Sunnis.

Observations and Recommendations on ESSENTIAL SERVICES and PUBLIC CORRUPTION

Many Iraqis believe the United States is the most powerful nation on earth and can accomplish almost anything. Iraqi citizens watched as we, in a matter of weeks, overwhelmed Saddam Hussein's military and conquered Iraq. Iraqis now ask themselves why the United States cannot supply electricity, fresh water, fuel, and control the sewage flowing into the Tigris and Euphrates.

We did a good job of explaining democracy to the Iraqis and why they should vote. We need to do a better job of explaining why Iraqis have problems receiving essential services and be outspoken about public corruption.

Although security prevents some contractors from completing their job, public corruption also plays a significant role in preventing the Iraqis from receiving essential services. Specifically, the government bureaucracy is paying in full for contracts before the work is completed. This allows unscrupulous contractors to pocket the money and walk away from their job before completion.

Much better controls and oversight of contracts need to be instituted—both for Iraqi and foreign contractors. Contractors should not be allowed to walk off jobs before completion. This is one area where the United States may have to take the lead for the time being and provide more auditors to oversee contracting efforts, and assist with oversight.

The Government Accountability Office has had too little presence in Iraq, and the offices of inspectors general conduct audits mostly in the safe areas of the international zone. If corruption is to be controlled and contracts completed so that essential services are restored, more oversight is necessary. These audits should take place not only in the international zone, but throughout Iraq.

These observations and recommendations are offered in the hope they will be of use in crafting the plans and policies needed to move Iraq forward toward the ultimate goal: a democratic Iraq. As always, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you more fully.

If you, or your staff, have any questions please contact me at 202-225-2546, or Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino, who has accompanied me on all of my trips to Iraq.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shays
Chairman